10: Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EGl Albania EGl

bajraktars to the south of it in non-tribal Martanesh; but there was none within its own boundaries. There factions, not tribes, were the social units, and all power, military and otherwise, was concentrated in the hands of four powerful bey families.

From first to last the primary function of a bajraktar was military. When one learned that war was imminent and troops were required, he had immediately to inform the tribe in the first instance by firing eight shots in quick succession into the air, and in the second by sending out the official runner called *kasnec* with news and a statement of how many men were wanted. One from each house was the usual number. The muster was soon complete, for it was thought shameful to hang back or to hide at home and no time was wasted hunting for deserters. When all had gathered, the march began. Two tribesmen in some cases, and in others four, led off singing. Next came a man closely connected with the bajraktar, preferably his eldest son, carrying the flag. The rank and file followed, firing constantly into the air to show their joy at the call to arms. Any sign of depression at leaving their homes would have been thought disgraceful and unmanly. The best warriors among them had the bajraktar in their midst and would guard him and the flag with their lives till they all came marching home again. No equipment was issued to bajraktars or 'soldiers'; each brought his own rifle and pistols and came in his ordinary clothes. Nor was any military training given them. Their value as soldiers depended upon the rifle practice which they had had at home. It was usually sufficient to make them all good shots. After a few months the war ended and they came home again, still in their peasant clothes and again firing into the air for joy.

In time of peace the bajraktar performed civilian duties. One of the chief was caring for the poor. If they got into trouble or needed work he intervened with the authorities. If they were benighted he gave them free board and lodging. On high occasions he sent them a ram on which to feast. So that they could buy on credit what they needed for their weddings and funerals he went guarantee for them at the village shops; perhaps he even paid for the goods when the following harvest failed and left them unable themselves to clear the debt. At times he lent them money without interest. In return he asked only that if required they would put their rifles at his disposal, joining him in attacking an enemy, spending some weeks annually in his house as unpaid or poorly paid guards,

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Monastery, I saw three. They stood with their hands on their knees and their heads thrust under the desk from which the pope was to read the Lessons. The desk being draped, their heads were hidden and their hind-quarters protruded grotesquely. If they could refrain from crowing during the reading of the Lessons they would be cured. The cure failed. Hardly had the pope begun to read when a hideous and unearthly din arose beneath his desk. No one intervened; no one even smiled. The pope read steadily, though his voice was drowned by the noise. At the end the three were led away—uncured. But I was told that as a rule the cure is successful. It may well be, for the Balkan peasant is very much affected by suggestion. He pines if he believes he has been cursed; he dies if he believes his death is "egil" (written in the Book of Fate). I did not see or hear of a case of crowing hysteria in Albania.

In Montenegro I was told a remedy for fever. It was to make fire with a fire-drill of wood. The patient helped to work the drill. The fire went out of him and into the wood and he was cured. Perhaps the exertion of drilling produced sweat and so relieved the patient. Krsto believed greatly in this cure.

6. Soothsaying

For some inscrutable reason man in many lands has thought his gods were likely to choose the insides of animals as a means for revealing the future.

"Plucking the entrails of an offering forth, they could not find a heart within the beast." So the augurs warned Cæsar to beware the ides of March. Balkan folk still find their fate written in the bones of certain animals.

I first saw the bones read at Selchan, a village in the Spata mountains, near Elbasan. It was in those days a very remote spot, and a Russian Consul was the only foreigner who had visited it within memory. Most of the male population were "wanted" by the Turkish Government. But for the purpose of my visit the friendly Albanian Mutasarif of Elbasan arranged a truce. We were halted outside the village for a parley, and also to give time to all the men of military age (whom the Government was trying to conscript for the Army) to hide in the bushes. I was then received with great joy, and even greater hospitality. The ancient headman, Constantine Suliman, a fine figure in a white fustanella, swore friendship, and hustled the women to spread a noble banquet of roast lamb, stewed fowl, cheese, milk, and maize-bread.

The district had neither church nor mosque. Every inhabitant had

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Every inhabitant had two names: a Christian name, under cover of which he refused military service; and a Moslem one, under which he refused to pay poll-tax. Constantine Suliman declared the plan worked admirably, and his tribe was practically independent. Pressed by my Christian interpreter, who was grieved at the absence of any religion, our host said that when a priest occasionally visited the place he was allowed to baptize all children that had meanwhile been born.

It was a fit spot for seeing, for the first time, the soothsaying of ancient days.

The two armed men sent with me as escort gorged the meal, and grinned affably at the heads of tribesmen which now and then bobbed up from behind bushes to peep at us.

Then Constantine Suliman picked up the fowl's breast-bone and held it against the sun. He carefully traced all the lines made by the marrow, and said gravely: "One of us five will die within a fortnight." All took it very seriously, except my interpreter, who was an employé of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and said it was very wrong to read bones, but was uneasy. He and I survived the fortnight. I have always hoped that Constantine Suliman was not the one—if any—who was shot. I saw him last, against the sky, waving dignified farewells to us, and remember him as the man who had lived eighty years and never seen peace, but had kept his honour clean according to his lights—and which of us can say more?

All through the North Albanian mountains I found the reading of bones common and greatly believed in. In times of danger and political tension the primitive rite in wild surroundings was sometimes strangely dramatic.

In Montenegro, too, the custom was common. I saw the bones read there in October 1912, just before Montenegro declared war and set the war-ball rolling which has not yet quite stopped. Battalions of up-country Montenegrins were pouring into Podgoritza and camping near the barracks. I wandered among them. An old man a-squat on the ground with some comrades was hungrily devouring some food they had brought with them. He raised a well-picked mutton bladebone against the autumn sun and stared and stared. I waited, and he cried out despairingly. His comrades jeered. But the old man turned to me and said: "I see blood everywhere—much blood." The younger men said it must be Turkish blood and were cheerful. But the old grey-head had seen war before they were born and was uncomforted. Sadly he told me he feared it meant evil, and I left him staring into the bone in vain search of hope. He read, indeed, but too truly. The war of 1912, into which Montenegro rushed with such hope of greatness and glory, was the beginning of the end of Montenegro.